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Public School Music and the Publisher

(INTRODUCTORY NOTE: This article has been written at the request of the Editor by a member of one of the important music publishing houses. To avoid any semblance of advertising it is printed anonymously.—P. W. D.)

The disposition to question the sincerity of public school music publishers toward the development of the subject is regrettable. Based, as it is, upon a lack of knowledge of the history of public school music in this country it fails to do justice to an interest in the cause of public school music which has been rather peculiar. Music books are by no means the remunerative part of the publications of the larger school book houses that they are popularly supposed to be. The reason that so much attention has been given to music by publishing houses lies in the fact that two of the largest school book houses in the country started business with music books, Ginn & Company and Silver, Burdett & Company. Years ago the house of Ginn, Heath & Company came into existence through the publication of the "National Music Course" by Luther Whiting Mason.

Because of the fact that these two houses began with the publishing of music books there naturally followed the tradition in both of them that school music was a subject to be fostered, protected, enlarged, and directed. There was a personal interest in the development of school music which could never have been the case under other circumstances. In introducing music books into the various cities of the country the publishers for their own protection found it necessary to see that their material was properly taught and to this end they felt it right and, indeed, necessary to assist in the preparation of the music teachers. Summer

schools were organized for the special purpose of training teachers and at a considerable financial loss these schools were maintained for years in order to train teachers to supervise the subject. At first, these summer schools were small and a great deal of pioneer work was necessary. The publishers, however, spurred on by the growing interest in the subject and by the tradition that the development of public school music was an important element in their publishing plans, continued these schools year after year, securing as instructors the most successful teachers they could find and urging bright and talented young musicians to enter this field of work. The result of this pioneer movement on the part of the publishers may be appreciated when we realize that there is hardly a higher educational institution of prominence in the country (college, university or normal school) and hardly a music school or conservatory of consequence today, in which one will not find a more or less thoroughly organized course in public school music. Many of these institutions are now introducing summer courses, and in not a few instances are exchanging credits with the schools of various publishing houses.

For the reason previously mentioned, namely, in order that the course of music introduced into a city should be so taught that it would prove successful, the publishers discovered not only the necessity for skilfully trained teachers, but also the importance of seeing that a

well trained teacher should be brought in touch with important positions. For many years in the early development of public school music, school committees and *even school superintendents* failed to realize the absolute necessity for specially trained supervisors. In a great many cities, the fact that a young man or woman could play the piano a little, or sing a little, was all that was necessary, plus some personal influence, to secure such a position. Such unskilled teaching as they could do naturally resulted in poor work and a consequent disfavor on the part of educators and even on the part of the public toward music in the schools. Music was often looked upon as a fad, as a thing apart from real education, and a subject to be taken up or dropped at the whim of influential members of the school committee. Such a state of affairs naturally seriously affected the commercial interests of the school music book publishers and in several instances they found it necessary to do everything in their power to see that their books were taught by skilled instructors.

That all of these matters should have resulted in occasional abuses no one would deny. Neither would one deny that in the heat of campaigns for adoptions of books or for changes of textbooks, things may have occurred which would be regrettable. But it seems reasonable to affirm that such instances were no more a part of the campaign in the interest of public school music books than in the interests of other books. Such abuses as may have resulted from over-zeal in competition are now practically eliminated. Indeed, both the publishers and the public have come to realize that clean open

business and proper relationship with school teachers and with school officers are the surest ways to success in the advancement of school music publications. The contention that because a publishing house has aided a deserving teacher in securing a position and has thereby obligated her to use only the material of that house, is not borne out in fact. There are too many teachers throughout the country, who freely use publications from any or all concerns to make such a statement worthy of consideration. Naturally a publishing house would be slow to recommend for a position someone who is known to be more favorably disposed to the *methods advocated* by a rival publisher. Such an action would be absurd from any viewpoint.

All of these matters are well understood today by the majority of school superintendents who freely confer with the publishing houses regarding the selection of teachers. The publishing houses are glad to assist good teachers to secure positions without the payment of fee. The advantage that they derive from the superior teaching of their publications eventually compensate them. The teachers' agencies also look to the publishers for assistance in the matter of locating good teachers. There has dawned an era of higher minded competition among the publishers.

The publishers are interested in school music; they have been one of the most important factors in bringing about its present high state of development. They desire to contribute to its continuance in every legitimate way. They ask no favors, but they do wish and hope that their efforts will be understood and not misinterpreted.